

## Jesus is ... – The Bread of Life

Jan. 8, 2017- Pastor Randy

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For the past couple of weeks you have heard us talk about beginning the new year with a 21 day journey that I am calling 21 Days of Devotion. Back in November I read an article on Christianpost.com. The rather long title was, "Less Than Half of Practicing Christians Read Their Bible and the Rest of America is Even Worse." The second part is peculiar in that it states the obvious. Why would we expect non-Christians or non-practicing Christians to read the bible more than practicing Christians? The article cited a talk by Samuel Harrell, President/Founder of the Center for Christian Nonprofit Excellence. He has served as an advisor to two City of Philadelphia Mayors' Offices. Samuel also serves currently as the Philadelphia Ministry Mobilizer for the American Bible Society. His mandate is to increase Bible engagement in the City of Philadelphia by 2025.

Mr. Harrell cited research conducted over a period of six years by the Barna group which indicated that just over 18% of the American population 18 yrs. or older reads the bible. Only 37% of those who identified themselves as "practicing Christians" engage with their bible.

This is significant because the bible is God's chosen means of revealing Himself to us. What we know about Jesus comes from the New Testament, and mostly from the the first four books which we call the "Gospels". If only 37% of practicing Christians are consistently engaged with their bibles - the fundamental source of knowledge about Christ - then only 37% of Christians are actually mentally and spiritually prepared to follow Jesus. I wonder what the percentage would be among those who call Calvary home? Whatever it is, my goal is that this 21-day journey will spark growth in our personal bible study.

John 6:47-60

*"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. Yes, I am the bread of life! Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. Anyone who eats the*

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*bread from heaven, however, will never die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.” Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” they asked. So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever.” He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. Many of his disciples said, “This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?”*

In order to understand these words, we need to know the backstory. In the opening verses of chapter 6 we find Jesus sitting with his 12 disciples on a hillside and a huge crowd of people has followed him to where he was because he had healed many sick people. Jesus asked Philip where they could get bread to feed all the people. John tells us Jesus asked this question to test Philip. Philip’s reply was in effect to tell Jesus that what Jesus was suggesting was just not possible. Andrew, another disciple spoke up and said, “There is a boy here with 5 small loaves and two fish, but what is that? Jesus took the 5 loaves and two fish, gave thanks and began to distribute the food. After He was done he sent the 12 disciples out among the people to pick up the leftovers and there were 12 baskets full...ONE FOR EACH DOUBTING DISCIPLE. I can imagine the disciples returning and Jesus asking, “Well what do you have? Are you going to be able to eat all that yourselves? Sometimes Jesus shows up...and then there are times when he SHOWS OFF. Why can’t Jesus have a little fun doing the miraculous!

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There is an important lesson here. Jesus took this meager, paltry, lunch and GAVE THANKS FOR IT!! Andrew spoke with a despising tone, "What is this?" DO NOT DESPISE WHAT LITTLE YOU HAVE!! DON'T CURSE THE LITTLE YOU HAVE, BLESS IT! COMPLAINING AND GRUMBLING DOESN'T INVITE GOD'S BLESSING, BUT THANKSGIVING DOES!!

Now following the miracle, the people wanted to make Jesus King! Of course, who wouldn't want a king or President that can provide for all our needs without us having to work for it? The next day the people came looking for Jesus again. *Jesus told them, "You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."*

Jesus scolded them for their fixation on feeding their physical needs rather than their spiritual needs. Their response only proved Jesus point all the more. They replied, "Ok, we will believe in you...if you first show us a sign...we have an idea, Moses got us manna from heaven, how about you do that one!"

There are two reasons they would ask Jesus to duplicate the miracle God performed through Moses. We learn from Jewish texts outside the Bible that by Jesus' day a belief developed among the Jews that when their Messiah came he would perform another manna miracle. So they might have asked Jesus to do this to prove that he was the Messiah, the promised coming deliverer and king of the Jews. But their request also seems like a simple attempt to manipulate. I realize that it seems crazy to think someone would try and manipulate God! But if we are honest, most of us have tried manipulation to motivate God to act in our self interest. Some of us have tried to bribe God or guilt God into doing what we want.

Jesus picked up on their reference to the manna God provided in the wilderness and used it to draw a comparison between what God did by sending manna from heaven, with what God did by sending him from

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heaven. Manna was a bread which could sustain life only temporarily, but Jesus is the one who provides life eternally. Speaking metaphorically, he said, "I am the bread of life, Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. And in verse 40 he said, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Jesus metaphorical language should be very obvious to the careful listener. Jesus is far superior to the bread they ate the day before or the bread their ancestors ate which came from heaven. Eating that bread sustains temporarily, but Jesus is able to sustain eternally.

In verses 50 Jesus hints at the means by which he will provide eternal life – his sacrificial death. He said, "*...and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.*" Verses 53-58 would admittedly be very difficult to accept on their own out of context. It sounds like cannibalism. But it is clear that He is just pressing the metaphor a little further.

He has already explained that our hunger and thirst are satisfied eternally through "coming to him" and "believing in him". He uses eating and drinking as metaphors for believing in him.

In chapter 7 at feast of tabernacles Jesus stood up and cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." Drinking Jesus is equated with believing in him.

Jesus use of "eating his flesh" as a metaphor for believing in him helps us understand something about the character of genuine belief. The food we eat becomes a part of us. The nature of genuine belief is such that it causes those who possess it to attach themselves (i.e. "eating Him") to Jesus. This understanding of the biblical concept of faith is sorely lacking today. In scripture to believe in someone implies a commitment or allegiance to the person. In verse 56 Jesus equates abiding in him with eating. He said, "Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him." In verse 57 Jesus said, "anyone who feeds on me will live because of me."

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Belief in Jesus is not academic. It is not mere mental agreement to a set of facts about Him. It is much more intimate and impactful. "Believing in Jesus" means "feeding on Jesus". It results in an allegiance to Jesus where we identify ourselves with him. His will becomes our will, His joy becomes our joy, His concerns become our concerns.

Why didn't Jesus clarify his metaphorical speech. Because his intention was to separate those who followed him for the right reasons from those who followed just to get something. This discussion began with Jesus telling the crowd that they were not seeking Him for the right reasons. And how did it end? With the crowd and many disciples walking away. Just a moment ago he was the best thing since sliced bread! But now many have deserted Him. One of my favorite statements in all of scripture is Peter's response when Jesus asked the 12 disciples if they were going to desert him many others had done. *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."* Do you feel like Peter? Can you say today, "There is no one else for me. How could I walk away from the one who is "the way".

At the Christmas Eve service, I mentioned that what sets Jesus apart from every other major historical figure that has ever lived is that only Jesus call people to make a decision about him. He is the most provocative person that ever lived. His actions and his words provoked controversy wherever He went. Chapter 6 contains some of His most provocative statements:  
*"You should be seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you."*  
*"This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent."*  
*"But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day."*  
*"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever."*

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If you talk like this you have to be a crazy person...unless, of course you are the CREATOR, the author of life, and the one who has come to overcome the sin which has corrupted our world. This is exactly what Jesus has come to do! His mission was to overcome sin which corrupts our present life and leads to death, the corruption of our future life. The phrase "eternal life" expressed not only the enduring nature of this life, but also the abundant nature of this life. It is the kind of life that you would expect to be experienced by someone who has been freed from the power of sin and enjoys the experience of God's presence with them.

*If we understand that Jesus is the source of abundant life now and forever, our response should be the same as Peter's:*

*"Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. I might not understand everything you have said, but I understand enough to know that you are THE ONE I NEED. I do not understand everything I see you do, but I have seen enough to know that you are THE ONE I NEED. Jesus, I could leave...but where would I go?*

*I learned long ago I need more than myself. I learned long ago about the limits of other people. I could turn away to idols. But they have ears that can't hear, eyes that can't see, mouths that can't speak, hands that can't touch, and feet that can't move. To whom are we going to go to find grace like Jesus? To whom are we going to go to find truth like Jesus? To whom are we going to go to find power like Jesus? Who is faithful like Jesus? Who is wise like Jesus? Who is righteous like Jesus? Who forgives like Jesus? Who is patient like Jesus? Who delivers like Jesus? Who loves like Jesus? WHO GIVES LIFE, ABUNDANT LIFE, ETERNAL LIFE...BUT Jesus.*